

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

The Swiss priority date of the present application is May 6, 1998. Enclosed is a verified translation of the priority document in support of the applicants' reliance on this date.

Claims 2, 3, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 23, 25 and 41-51 are pending. Amendments and arguments for allowance were presented in the Amendment dated August 26, 2005.

These claims were finally rejected in the Office Action dated November 17, 2005. In order to develop the new grounds for rejection, it was necessary for the Examiner to apply the following new references: Helber '438, Brooke '884, Park '303 and Kashef '111. However, the effective U.S. filing dates of these references are September 10, 1998; March 3, 1999; March 26, 1999; and August 5, 1999, respectively. Each of these dates is after the priority date to which the present application is entitled, and therefore the new references do not qualify as prior art.

Thus, although the new grounds for rejection were necessitated by the Amendment of August 26, 2005, none of the new references qualifies as prior art. Therefore, the Examiner should now withdraw the final rejection and allow claims 2, 3, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 23, 25 and 41-51.

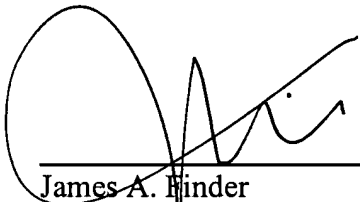
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February 16, 2006
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Respectfully submitted,



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